



THE

SECOND BOOK

OF

BENJAMIN.

A RECORD OF

THINGS PAST, PRESENT, AND TO COME.

“ Benjamin shall ravin as a wolf.”—GEN. XLIX. 27.

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THE SECOND BOOK OF BENJAMIN.

CHAPTER I.

THE LAMENTATION OF BENJAMIN.

Now it came to pass, while Benjamin rested in his house, and bethought him of all the great things he had done, that his heart was lifted up within him, and he said : Behold, now, who is there that can stand against me ? Verily there is not one of all the nobles and great ones of the land that is equal unto me.

And while he yet spake there came unto him one bringing letters from Owen the Poet, the Governor of the great province of India. Now, this man Owen had in other days made verses and songs for the people ; but now had he left making verses that he might make laws for the people of India. And his verses, inasmuch as they were not well understood by the people, were better than his laws, for they were hard and grievous to be borne. And among other things he made a decree that no one should write anything on scrolls of paper in the language of the people of India, except the words written were pleasing unto him ; and if any one broke this law, and did sell such scrolls of paper unto the people, he should be punished. And many such like things he did, and his name stank in the nostrils of the people of India.

And the letters that he sent unto Benjamin were on this wise : Behold now thine enemy, the Emperor of Russia, hath sent an Ambassador to the Ameer of Afghanistan, and the Ameer hath received him and given him bread and salt. See to it, therefore, whether this quarrel be thine or mine : if it be thine, well ; but if it be mine, shall I not make war upon the Ameer, for the thing that he hath done is evil unto the great province of India ?

And when Benjamin had read the letters, he tore his beard, and girt about his loins with sackcloth, and put ashes on his head. And he cursed the Emperor of Russia,

and all his father's house, and cried aloud unto Jingo, inasmuch as he had suffered this thing to come to pass.

And he sat down in sackcloth and ashes, and bewailed the thing that had come to pass.

And Benjamin opened his mouth and said :—

Cursed be the night wherein I was born, and the day when first I saw the light.

What shall it profit me now that I have done all these wonderful things?

Behold they are as nought ; they are like the leaves that are driven away by the wind.

And my greatness is like the creeper on the wall, which putteth forth its flowers in the morning, but withereth when the sun is up.

And I, even I, whom the people delighted to honour, whose name is in all the lands, shall become a byword among the nations of the earth.

And mine enemies that speak against me—yea, even this Gladstone the Liberal, whom I have overthrown—will cry Ha ! Ha ! and mock at me in the day of my calamity.

For the Emperor of Russia hath risen up against me ; even the man whose teeth I had broken in pieces.

Did I not create an Empress, a great and powerful Name, that should be for a barrier against him?

Did I not send ships unto the City of the Sultan? I regarded neither right nor justice therein.

Did I not bring troops, a great multitude—even seven thousand men that bore arms, and horses not a few—from the great province of India unto Europe?

Did I not obtain six millions from the people in their poverty, and lay hands on the island of Cyprus?

Who is there that can gainsay any of the things which I have done? Are they not written in the chronicles of the lands?

And now behold the Emperor of Russia is not terrified thereby, but hath it in his heart to do us an injury.

Verily he will succeed therein, and will take away our power ; and we shall be even as we were in the days of Gladstone the Liberal.

And when he had made an end of speaking, he mourned in sackcloth and ashes, and none durst venture nigh unto him, for the greatness of his grief.

CHAPTER II.

GATHORNE THE BOLD AND THE LETTERS TO THE AMEER.

AND when the bitterness of his grief was past, he called for Montague the Scribe, and bade him write letters unto Gathorne the Bold, for all that concerned the great province of India pertained unto him. And when Gathorne the Bold received the letters of Benjamin, he hasted and put sandals on his feet and a girdle about his loins, and mounted on an ass, and came unto the house of Benjamin. And when he had lighted off the ass, he put the shoes from off his feet, and stood without. And one went in and told Benjamin, saying : Behold, Gathorne the Bold hath come unto thee, and is even now waiting without. And Benjamin answered and said : Suffer him to come in. And Gathorne the Bold came into the house, and he bowed himself down on the threshold and made obeisance unto Benjamin, and said : Is it well with my lord ? for thy servant hath heard of the greatness of thy grief. Let my lord now be comforted, and let the light of his countenance shine upon the people of this land. For my Lord is unto the people even as the sun in his strength.

And Benjamin stretched forth his hand unto Gathorne the Bold, and blessed him, and said : Blessed art thou among those that are born of women ; thou shalt be great among the children of men. And when he had made an end of blessing him, he said : Behold now these letters from Owen the Poet ; what is thy advice and counsel therein ?

And when Gathorne the Bold had read the letters, he said : Who is thy servant that my lord should ask counsel and advice of him ? But if my lord will hear me, this is my counsel : let my lord send unto the Emperor of Russia, and demand of him that he recall the Ambassador whom he hath sent unto the Ameer ; if he do so, well ; but if he will not hearken unto thee in this thing, then shalt thou make war upon him, and take away his name and place from among the nations of the earth.

And Benjamin said: Verily speakest thou as a fool speaketh. For the Emperor of Russia hath many men to do his bidding, and horsemen and footmen a great multitude, and weapons not a few; wherefore it would be hard to contend with him, and the cost thereof would be great. But the Ameer is weak, and his armies be few in number; wherefore we will compel him to send away the Ambassador, and if the Emperor be wroth thereat, verily the Ameer hath done it, and not we. Write, therefore, unto Owen the Poet, and bid him send letters unto the Ameer. And thus shall he say unto the Ameer: Inasmuch as thou hast received an Ambassador from the Emperor of Russia, thou shalt likewise receive an Ambassador from the Empress of India. And thou shalt grant unto her certain places in thy dominions, where her servants may dwell to look after the interests of her Empire. And if thou do this thing, it shall be well with thee and with thy people; but if thou wilt not hearken unto us in this thing, thy blood be upon thine own head, for thou hast provoked the Empress to wrath; and who can stand before the fire of her fury?

Thus and thus shall he say unto the Ameer; but let him not wait until the Ameer have received the letters, and sent an answer thereunto, but send the Ambassador forthwith, so that, if the Ameer refuse to receive him, it may seem an insult unto the people of England, and may provoke them to war. For we have need of the territory of the Ameer to strengthen the great province of India.

And when Benjamin had made an end of speaking, Gathorne the Bold answered and said: Verily, the words of my lord are as the words of an angel from heaven; even as my lord hath said, so shall it be done.

And Gathorne the Bold wrote the letters, and sent them by the hands of a fast runner unto Owen the Poet, the Governor of the great Province of India.

CHAPTER III.

THE AMEER OF AFGHANISTAN—THE WAR WITH THE
AMEER.

AND it came to pass, when Owen the Poet had received the letters that had been written unto him by the hand of Gathorne the Bold, that he rejoiced greatly, and said : Now shall I be able to make strong the great province of India, and extend the borders thereof, even as did the governors who were before me in the days of our fathers. And my glory shall be even as theirs.

And he called for a scribe, and caused him to write letters even as Benjamin had said ; and when he had made an end of writing all that Benjamin had commanded him, he added this thereunto : Take heed now, for thou art as an earthen vessel between a brazen and an iron pot ; verily thou shalt be broken in pieces. And he sent the letters unto the Ameer.

And after a few days, when no answer had come from the Ameer (for the distance was great, and the time had not been sufficient thereto), he wrote letters again unto Benjamin, saying : Behold, now, the Ameer hath despised thee and the letters thou hast sent, for he hath taken no heed thereof. Shall I not make ready my armies against him, and send them forth conquering and to conquer ? For if we delay longer in this matter, the people of India will say we fear him and the power of his armies, and will rise up themselves against us, and drive us forth from the land.

And when Benjamin had received the letters he rejoiced, and was exceeding glad ; and he said : Behold, now, is not Owen the Poet a man after mine own heart ? and it rejoiceth me that I made him Governor of the great province of India.

Nevertheless, in this thing he must wait until he have received the letters of the Ameer ; for the people of England and Gladstone the Liberal will demand papers ; and if it should appear that we had made war on the Ameer with-

out cause, then would their anger be kindled against me, and they would drive me forth into the wilderness.

And he sent unto Gathorne the Bold, and bade him write thus and thus unto Owen the Poet, and say unto him : Wait, nevertheless, until letters have come from the Ameer, and so deal in the matter that it shall seem unto the people of England that the Ameer hath insulted them, for then will they be like a bull in their fury.

And when Owen the Poet had received the letters, his anger was kindled against Benjamin, inasmuch as he had bade him wait ; nevertheless, because he feared Benjamin, he did not make war at once upon the Ameer ; but this thing he did, he wrote once and again unto Benjamin, saying : Verily, the people of India will despise us if we do not make war upon the Ameer.

And it came to pass, when the Ameer had received the letters that had been sent unto him by Owen the Poet, that he tore his hair and smote upon his breast, and said : See now how these people, even the English, do seek a quarrel against me, and all to take away my kingdom. For what evil have I done, or what is it to them that I have received the Ambassador of the Emperor of Russia ? Shall I not receive in mine own house whomsoever I will ? And behold, now, they made promises unto me, in days that are gone, that they would not seek to send an Ambassador to dwell in the land, but in this thing they regard not their oaths ; verily they are a people whose hands are stretched forth unto all lands, a selfish and a grasping people, for whom there is no living on the earth. And the Ameer sent letters unto Owen the Poet, saying : The Ameer unto Owen the Poet, greeting. Behold now, inasmuch as it hath been agreed upon aforetime that the English should not reside in my territory, I cannot do the thing that thou askest, for my people be a turbulent people ; peradventure they would do an injury unto the Ambassador. But it is in my mind to be friendly with the people of England, and to remain at peace with them, for I desire not war ; nevertheless, if they will make war upon me, I shall resist them to the uttermost of my power. And as for the Ambassador of the Emperor of Russia, I desired not his presence here ; but inasmuch as he hath eaten both bread and salt, I cannot bid him depart.

And when Owen the Poet received the letters of the Ameer, he was exceeding glad, for he said : Now will I

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make war upon the Ameer. And he sent once again letters unto the Ameer, saying: Inasmuch as thou hast refused to hearken unto me in this thing, it is a sign unto me that thou art evil disposed towards the people of England; wherefore let it be known unto thee that, if thou wilt not receive the Ambassador before the twentieth day of the month, the armies of the Empress shall come upon thee and upon thy people, and shall destroy them down to the ground.

And when the twentieth day of the month had come, and no letters had been received from the Ameer, Owen the Poet commanded the armies to make ready their arms, and on the next day he sent them forth to make war upon the Ameer.

CHAPTER IV.

THE GREAT FEAST—THE SPEECH OF BENJAMIN—THE ACTS OF THE LEGISLATORS.

AND when this thing came unto the ears of the people of England, they were divided among themselves; but at the first the more part were in favour of the war, for they believed the words of Benjamin that the Ameer had insulted the people of England. But other some believed not the words of Benjamin, and said: Let be now till we see the papers; peradventure the thing is not as Benjamin hath said.

And it came to pass in those days that the ruler of the great city, even London, did make a feast for the lords and the great ones of the land, and Benjamin was invited thereunto.

And on a set day, when the feast was come, the lords and the great ones of the land did gather themselves together unto the feast that the ruler had made.

And the feast was an exceedingly great feast, and delicate meats and fruits were brought from the uttermost parts of the earth; and there were vessels of gold and silver not a few, according to the state of the ruler. And they served them meat in costly dishes and wine in abundance, and there was no lack.

And the lords and the great ones of the land did eat and drink, and were merry.

And when they had made an end of feasting, they drank wine unto Benjamin, and called upon him by name; for such is the custom at feasts. And the great hall resounded with the clinking of glasses, and with the sound of his name. And when they had made an end of shouting, Benjamin rose up to make a speech; for it is a custom at feasts, when any one is called upon by name, that he should make a speech, and if it come to pass that he saith strange things men say of such a one, verily it was an after-dinner speech. And Benjamin spake pleasantly unto the lords and the great ones, and comforted their hearts, and they cried, Hear, hear.

And Benjamin said: Behold, now, ye have heard that the Ameer hath refused to receive the Ambassador of the Empress of India, which thing is an insult unto the people of this great and mighty Empire. Wherefore, it seemed good unto our Imperial Mistress to send forth her armies against him, that they might chastise him for his insolence, and break in pieces his power. And her armies have done valiantly, and have laid hands on the territory of the Ameer, so that we have gained the thing we sought, and have strengthened the great province of India against the Emperor of Russia.

And now it hath been said by some that the boundary of the great province of India is by nature strong and easy of defence, and that in seeking to enlarge it we do weaken the strength thereof; but they who do say these things are sophistical rhetoricians carried away by the flood of their own egotistical verbosity, and their language is but the hairbrained chatter of irresponsible frivolity. Wherefore, let no man give heed unto their words. For it is well known unto you that, although the boundary of the province be strong by nature, yet is it a haphazard and not a scientific frontier, and unworthy of this great and scientific nation. Wherefore, shall not the boundary be rectified even as seemeth good unto us; and if so be that it be regarded unfavourably by the Ameer, it is his misfortune; nevertheless it shall come to pass.

And many other things did Benjamin say unto the lords and great ones of the land, using a multitude of words; and inasmuch as they could not readily understand the meaning and signification thereof, they did shout aloud, Hear, hear!

and praised Benjamin greatly. For it is the custom of the people of England to give great praise unto that which they do not understand, for they say : Peradventure the words are wise—yea, even as silver and gold, seeing that we know not the meaning thereof. And when Benjamin saw that they understood not his words, he smiled in his own heart, and was glad ; nevertheless, outwardly he seemed as though he thought they had understood them all. And when they had well eaten and drunken, they rose up, and went every man unto his own house. And the power of Benjamin was increased.

And it came to pass in those days that Benjamin called together a council of those who served under him, and said unto them : Behold, now, inasmuch as we are at war with the Ameer, the people do loudly demand that the legislators be called together to consider this thing ; and although it is not meet that the legislators have aught to do therewith, inasmuch as I alone am sufficient thereunto, nevertheless, if we do not call them together, the people will grow into a tumult. And, moreover, money will be needed, which the legislators will give unto me, to do with it whatsoever seemeth right in mine own eyes. Wherefore, now, let them be called together, and that without fear, seeing that those on my side are more than those that be against me, and will do whatsoever I will.

And those who served under Benjamin agreed unto his words, and the legislators were called together to consider the quarrel between the Ameer and the people of England ; nevertheless, they were not called together until the war had broken out, and it was too late to draw back.

And on a set day, when the legislators had come together to the great Hall of the Nation that standeth beside Thames, the Queen made a speech unto them by the mouth of her servant, the Lord Chancellor of the Realm. And the speech was called the Queen's Speech ; nevertheless, the words were the words of Benjamin. And when the legislators had heard the words of the speech, they were divided among themselves, for they could not agree whether it had been just to make war upon them. And Gladstone the Liberal and those who were with him spake against the war, and their words were weighty and powerful ; nevertheless, as their numbers were few, the legislators decreed that the war was a just and righteous war, even as Benjamin had said.

And when they had so decreed, Benjamin dismissed them unto their own homes till he should have need of them again.

CHAPTER V.

BARTLE THE TIMID—THE WAR WITH THE KING OF THE ZULUS.

AND it came to pass in those days that letters came unto Benjamin from the Commissioner of the Queen in the land of South Africa. And the Commissioner had been sent thereunto aforetime that he might arrange the affairs of the provinces there, and make peace between those provinces which were under the Queen of England and those which were under their own rulers. For as yet not all the land of Africa belongs unto the Queen, inasmuch as it is a great land; nevertheless, there be those of the people of England who do prophesy that it shall be theirs, for they say it is the will of God, inasmuch as the people of the land be idolaters, and worship not the true God. Wherefore, it shall be given unto them that they may convert them from the worship of idols, and teach them to worship the Prince of Peace.

And the name of the Commissioner was Bartle; and inasmuch as he was of a timorous and fearful disposition, he is called Bartle the Timid to this day. And it came to pass that, when Bartle the Timid came unto the land of South Africa, he found it a pleasant and a fruitful land; yet was there trouble therein, for the people feared the King of the Zulus. Now, the Zulus were a mighty people, and the number of their armies was forty thousand men that bare arms—even a great multitude—and the name of their King was Cetywayo. And Cetywayo was more powerful than any of the Kings of the Zulus, and his name was a terror in the land.

And when they told Bartle the Timid of these things, his heart melted within him, and the joints of his loins were loosed, and his knees smote one against another. And he rested not neither day nor night, for dread of the Zulus and of Cetywayo, their King.

And he said there will be neither peace nor happiness in the land until the King of the Zulus be overthrown and his power taken away. Wherefore, he sent the letters unto Benjamin. And the letters were on this wise : Behold, now, the land is in danger from Cetywayo, the King of the Zulus, for he is a man of blood, and his house is the habitation of cruelty. And the people do fear for their lives because of him and the might of his armies ; wherefore, he must be overthrown. Let armies, therefore, be sent speedily, for the armies now in the land be not sufficient thereunto. And Benjamin caused letters to be sent unto him, saying : Be not swift to make war upon the Zulus. Is the danger so great, for it appeareth not so unto us ? Moreover, the armies that be already in the land are sufficient for the defence thereof, and it seemeth not good unto us to send more, inasmuch as our hands are full. And Bartle the Timid sent again and again unto Benjamin, saying the same things, for his fear was great, his days were full of sorrow, and his nights were broken and troubled ; wherefore, he ceased not to cry continually : The Zulus must be destroyed.

And when Benjamin had not given his consent thereunto, nor sent troops from the armies of England, Bartle the Timid could no longer contain himself, but resolved to do that which seemed good in his own eyes, for he knew that, although Benjamin had not consented unto him in this thing, yet in his heart he agreed therewith. Wherefore, he sent messengers unto Cetywayo, demanding of him, in the name of the Queen of England, things unto which he could in no wise consent, seeing that they concerned not the people of England. And among other things he demanded that Cetywayo should suffer his people to marry and be given in marriage. And when the demands of Bartle the Timid were made known unto Cetywayo, he laughed him to scorn, for he said : What is it to Bartle the Timid whether I do these things or not, seeing they neither concern him nor the people of England ? And now I seek not war with the people of England ; but, if it be so with Bartle the Timid, let him see to it, for mine armies are ready for battle. And when it was told unto Bartle the Timid that Cetywayo would not listen unto him in this thing, he sent for the Captain of the Queen's host in South Africa, and bade him make ready his armies, and lead them unto the armies of Cetywayo, the King of the Zulus. Now, the

Captain of the Queen's host was not a great Captain, strong and ready of device, like the captains in the days of our fathers, but feeble and unskilled in war, and the name of him Chelmsford the Weak.

And Chelmsford the Weak made ready his armies, and led them unto the land of the Zulus, though their numbers were insufficient thereto. And he forgot that the Zulus were a people skilled in war, and brave as they who are bravest, but despised them, thinking verily that they would flee before him, as chaff before the wind. Wherefore, he took no heed to see that his armies were defended against the Zulus, for he doubted not but that they would flee before him. And it came to pass, as certain of his troops to the number of eight hundred were encamped in the land, that the Zulus came down upon them, even twenty thousand men. And the battle was fierce and bloody, and the soldiers of England fought as fought their fathers in the days that are gone; they turned not their backs nor fled, but where they stood, there died they, each man with his face to the foe. And many of the Zulus fell likewise; but, inasmuch as their numbers were great, they slew the soldiers of England down to the ground. Of all the eight hundred scarcely one escaped alive to tell the tale. And the name of the place where they fell was Isandlhana. And when this thing came unto the ears of the people of England, a great wail arose in the land, people lamenting for those who had fallen beneath the spears of the Zulus. And they swore in their wrath that they would destroy the Zulus utterly, and take away their name and place from the nations of the earth, for they forgot in their anger that the Zulus had only done the thing that was right in fighting for their lives, for their wives, and for their children. And when they knew this thing, and learnt how Bartle the Timid had made war upon the Zulus, their anger was kindled hot against him and against Chelmsford the Weak, and they demanded with one voice that they should be recalled.

And to please the people Benjamin did send unto Bartle the Timid, rebuking him that he had made war without his consent; and this he did openly, that the people might hear thereof; but privately it is said he did send letters unto Bartle the Timid, bidding him to take no heed of the rebuke, but to do that which seemed good in his own eyes. And unto Chelmsford the Weak a Royal message was sent

(as in the days of David the King, who sent unto Joab to comfort him for the loss of Uriah), bidding him be of good cheer and to take comfort, for, although his armies had been destroyed down to the ground, he was a great General, and worthy of all confidence. And as for those who had fallen in battle, it is their duty to be killed when it seemeth good unto the rulers of their land.

And again and again did Chelmsford the Weak suffer his armies to be caught in an ambush, and shut up in a fortified camp, so that they could not escape therefrom; and many of them were destroyed. And the people of England, whose sons and whose brothers they were, were exceeding wroth with Bartle the Timid and with Chelmsford the Weak, and they cried aloud unto Benjamin that he should send out unto them a captain skilled in war, inasmuch as it was necessary to finish the war now that it had been begun.

And at the first Benjamin heeded not their cry, but suffered them to remain. But when he found they could in no wise finish the war, he sent out unto them one in whom the people had confidence, that he might make an end thereof. And what shall be the end of this thing no man yet knoweth; nevertheless it shall appear in due season.

CHAPTER VI.

THE DISTRESS AMONG THE PEOPLE—BENJAMIN AND THE
IMPERIAL DEBTS.

AND in those days there was a famine in the land, and the suffering of the people was exceeding great; and their cry went up unto heaven. For a fierce wind blew from the north and from the east, piercing even to the joints and the

marrow ; and after the wind, a frost, till the ground was frozen up, and became like unto a stone ; and after the frost, snow fell abundantly, and all the land was white. And they whose business was to till the ground could do no work, for the land was covered with snow ; whence it came to pass that they had nought wherewith to give bread unto their wives and children. And as it was in the country, so was it in the town, only worse, forasmuch as there be more people there to suffer want. For, inasmuch as people knew not what Benjamin would do next, their confidence was shaken, and they would neither buy nor sell. For they said one to another : Who knoweth what Benjamin will do ? peradventure he will make war on the Emperor of Russia, or will stretch out his hands unto Burmah and Siam, or will take possession of Egypt ; and if he do, our commerce will suffer thereby ; wherefore, we will not buy nor sell. Whence it came to pass that all trade was dull, and all manner of handicraft was at a standstill ; and they who wrought in iron, and they who fashioned jewellery, and they whose business lay in cotton and woollen stuffs, had nothing that they might do. And as the people of England be not a provident people, but do rather waste their substance, want came upon them as an armed man, and they had nothing wherewith to resist it. And many of the better sort, who had means, did band themselves together in the towns of the land, and did give of their abundance unto those who were in want, and saved many. Nevertheless, the days were evil and full of suffering, and men prophesied that they would not pass away until Benjamin was overthrown, and driven forth into the wilderness, for they said the people can no more trust in him. But other some said : Nay, but let all the produce of other nations that is brought into the ports of England be taxed ; then will they of the people of England who produce the same things receive more money for the work of their hands ; and this thing will be a gain unto them. And this saying pleased certain of the people who were weak and easily led astray, for they thought within themselves that they should profit thereby. But they forgot that, if all these things were taxed, they would themselves have to pay the taxes, for the prices would increase, so that what they received in one hand would be taken out of the other, and more thereunto. And they who said these things were on the side of Benjamin, and upheld his power.

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And it came to pass in those days that the time drew near when the Keeper of the Royal Treasures should declare unto the legislators the state of the Treasury, and demand the sums that were needed for the months that should follow. And men knew that that which should be paid out of the Treasury was more than that which should be paid into it, and they wondered among themselves what should be done. And Benjamin called together the lords and the great ones who did serve under him, and said unto them : Behold, now, the Keeper of the Royal Treasures hath shown unto me that the Treasury is empty ; the gold and the silver is all gone, and the money that shall be paid thereunto is less than the money that must be paid therefrom. What think ye, therefore, of this thing, and what shall be done therein ? And they were divided among themselves, some saying one thing and some another. And when they could not agree, Benjamin spake again, and said : Behold, now, if we pay the money that should be paid out of the Treasury, it will be necessary to tax the people more heavily. And ye know that the days be nigh at hand when the people shall be called upon to choose whom they will have to rule over them : if, therefore, we do this thing, and tax them more heavily, will they not turn against us, and drive us forth into the wilderness ? Wherefore, my advice and opinion is that we put off this matter till a more convenient season. And if it should come to pass that the voice of the people be given for us, then, when we be seated in our high places again, will we tax the people as seemeth good unto us, and will pay this thing ; but if they should reject us, and drive us forth into the wilderness, then will we leave this thing to those who shall come after us as a legacy and a burden heavy to be borne.

And they were pleased at the words of Benjamin, and did agree thereunto ; and they smiled one to another, and said : Behold how Benjamin hath prepared a pitfall for Gladstone the Liberal.

And on a set day, when the time was fully come, the Keeper of the Royal Treasures went down unto the great Hall of the nation, and made a speech unto the legislators, and said even as Benjamin had commanded him. So the taxes were not increased ; but, inasmuch as the money must be paid, the bill was left as a heritage for a time that should come.

CHAPTER VII.

THE FALL OF BENJAMIN.

AND it came to pass, as I wrote the words of this Book, and thought of all the things that Benjamin had done, that my spirit was troubled exceedingly, and my heart was moved within me, for I said : What now shall happen unto the land if Benjamin be not removed from the high place thereof ? Verily it will be destroyed, and will become as the nations of the past—yea, like unto a city in the wilderness where no life is. For Benjamin will take the young men, even all that are of an age to bear arms, and will send them unto Afghanistan and unto Zululand, unto Burmah and unto Egypt, unto Roumelia and unto Asia Minor, unto Cyprus and the islands of the sea, until they be perished every one. And the old men, the women, and children, inasmuch as they be not sufficient for the work of the land, and for the burden of the taxes thereof, will perish with hunger, till only a remnant be left alive. And the land shall be desolate, and the cities shall be overthrown—yea, grass shall grow in the streets thereof. And the beasts of the desert and the fowls of the air shall dwell therein. There shall the fox make his den, and the young fox shall play in the streets thereof, and no man regard him.

And, as I thought on these things, my heart sank within me, for I said : Who can tell whether wisdom hath returned unto the people, or whether the spirit of evil that deceived them with flattering words, and tempted them to make choice of Benjamin, hath been cast out of their bosoms ? Peradventure their eyes are not yet opened unto the light, and their ears are heavy of hearing, so that Benjamin seemeth unto them as an angel of light, and they will choose him yet again to rule over them, and will give themselves over to do his will. And I said : Nevertheless will I cry aloud, and warn them, while there be yet time, that they listen not again unto the words of Benjamin, but drive him forth into the wilderness. And I feared

for the people lest their blindness had not departed from them.

And, as I pondered on these things, lamenting in my heart and fearing for the people, behold a voice, which said unto me : Be of good cheer and grieve not, for verily the time is nigh at hand—yea, even now is—when Benjamin shall be overthrown, and shall be driven forth into the wilderness to rule no more over the people of England to the day of his death.

And I said : Verily the news is good ; but how shall I know that this thing shall come to pass even as thou hast said ?

And the voice replied : Be not faithless, but believing, and I will show unto thee as in a glass the things that are about to be.

And there was, as it were, a glass before me, and the voice said unto me, Look !

And I looked, and, behold, I saw in the glass things present and things to come.

And the voice said unto me : Take thy pen and write the things that thou hast seen in a book, and send it forth unto the people, that they may know the things that are about to be.

And these be the things that I saw.

I looked, and beheld in the four corners of the glass, and at the top and the bottom thereof, men fighting—a great multitude. And the battle was exceeding fierce between them, and the ground was covered with the bodies of the slain. And as I looked, behold, the armies of England did overcome those who were fighting against them ; nevertheless, many of them also were slain, and but a remnant was left behind. And this remnant burnt the towns and villages of the land, and destroyed the inhabitants thereof.

And I looked again, and beheld in the glass as it were cities whence no smoke arose, and the mills and the workshops were idle, and the ships were rotting in the docks ; the people hung about the streets, and their garments were as rags, and their faces pale and wan. And one went through the streets, and did give bread unto the people, and they ate thereof ravenously. And the voice said : These be the fruits of the deeds of Benjamin. As a man soweth shall he not also reap ?—yea, all his deeds and the fruits of them be but Ruin and Desolation abroad, Misery and Starvation at home.

And I looked again, and saw a great multitude of people, and they were shouting and crying aloud. And the cities and towns did send men one by one unto a great Hall, and as they entered the doors thereof they uttered as it were a name, and one stood and wrote the name that they uttered. And the names were Benjamin and Gladstone the Liberal. And when they had made end of going into the Hall behold the numbers of those who had uttered the name of Benjamin and of Gladstone the Liberal were written up, so that all might read them. And the numbers were—Gladstone the Liberal, three hundred and ninety and five; and they who uttered the name of Benjamin were two hundred and sixty and three. And when the people saw the numbers, they rejoiced, and were exceeding glad, for now they knew that Benjamin should no more rule over them.

And I looked again, and behold I saw an old man bowed down with years come forth from the great Hall, and he covered his face with his mantle, so that none might discern who he was. And on his head he had as it were a wreath of gold. And he leaned on the arm of one who was with him, for he was feeble; and after him there came other ten, and their loins were girt about with sackcloth, and they had ashes on their heads. And as they went along, they tore their beards and smote upon their breasts. And as I looked and wondered what this thing should mean, the voice said: How are the mighty fallen! They who were lifted up unto heaven are cast down unto the earth, and their names shall be despised of men for evermore. This is that Benjamin who hath ruled the land, and hath done evil unto the people thereof; wherefore have they driven him forth into the wilderness. And he shall no more rule over the people of England, but shall abide in the wilderness till the day of his death. And these be they who served under him, and did his bidding. And his name shall no more be called Benjamin, but Benoni shall his name be called, for a Son of Sorrow hath he been unto the people of this land.

And when the voice had made an end of speaking, behold Benjamin and they who were with him had passed away into the wilderness and pitched their tents therein.

And I saw the land that aforetime had been barren and desolate grow fruitful once again, and the trees put forth their leaves, for the spring had come, and all the land rejoiced at the prospect thereof.

And I heard no more the voice, nor saw as it were the glass before me. Then took I my pen, and did write these things in a book, that it might go forth among the people and reveal unto them the things that shall come to pass.

And I say unto the people : Watch, for the time is nigh at hand ; see to it, therefore, that ye be ready, that the foe come not upon you when you be sleeping. Quit yourselves like men. Be strong.

He that hath ears to hear, let him hear.



